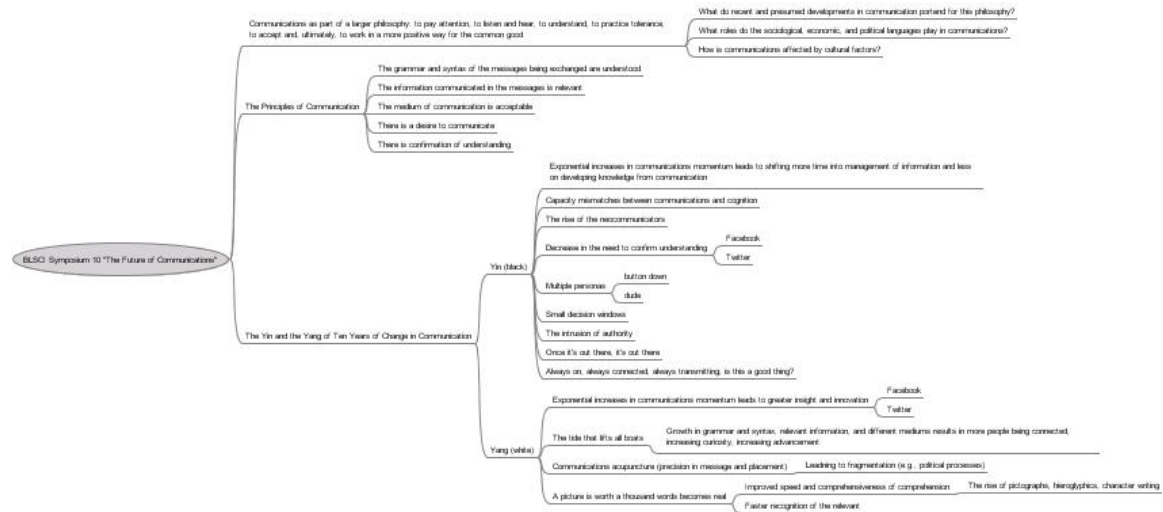


Preparatory Note for the Tenth Annual Symposium on Communications and Communications-Intensive Instruction

Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute

Baruch College

April 30, 2010¹



I have been asked to serve as one of several facilitators for Tenth Annual Symposium on Communications and Communications Intensive Instruction sponsored by the Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute at Baruch College. This is an honor that has been accorded me before. My prior habits have been to prepare a preparatory note to help me in the facilitation process (James Drogan, 2006a, 2007c, 2008b, 2009b). Occasionally, these conferences have produced documents exploring the theme in greater detail (James Drogan, 2006b, 2007d).

This note, then, is in preparation for the tenth annual symposium.

The introductory graphic to this paper is displayed in a larger form in the appendix to this document. My typical approach to preparing for a theme is to use mindmapping software to sketch and refine my ideas. The resulting map then becomes the outline for the paper.

Please note this a quick sketch and merits more thinking than I have been able to provide to date.

General Idea

The general idea to be followed rests upon considering the impact on the principles of communication of changed since the first symposium.

1. The grammar and syntax of the messages being exchanged are understood.
2. The information communicated in the messages is relevant.
3. The medium of communication is acceptable.
4. There is a desire to communicate.

¹ This document was lightly edited on May 11, 2018.

5. There is confirmation of understanding.

This consideration resulted in the branch in the diagram labeled *The Yin and the Yang of Ten Years of Change in Communication*. This paper will take up each of the sub-branches in more detail.

A second major consideration was more philosophical. What is communications for? This leads to three sub-branches that will also be taken up in more detail in the next section this paper.

Philosophy

The international relations theorist Robert W. Cox has written, "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose" (Cox, 2004, p. 752). The same is true for communications.

One other point to mention before continuing concerns the motivators of communication.

Four come to mind.

1. To be polite.
2. To attract attention.
3. To inform.
4. To prompt or forestall action.

The other thing that strikes me as important is consideration of whether the communication is push (communicator is dominant) or pull (audience is dominant) (James Drogan, 2009b).

My view is that communications as part of a larger philosophy: to pay attention, to listen and hear, to understand, to practice tolerance, to accept and, ultimately, to work in a more positive way for the common good. Communications, at its ultimate, leads to action culminating in an increase in the common good. This philosophy, however, is subject to three questions.

What do recent and presumed developments in communication portend for this philosophy?

Perhaps I am influenced by my approaching dotage, but developments in communication seem to severely test the philosophy sketched above. There are exponential increases in communications momentum (mass of stuff times the velocity at which the stuff arrives) that suggests a communicator dominant world where it is increasingly difficult to pay attention, to listen and hear, to understand, to practice tolerance, to accept and, ultimately, to work in a more positive way for the common good. Advertisements everywhere; bobbled-headed, blabbering would-be boffins assault our senses at a rate of speech approaching the speed of sound; the noise gathers, the silence retreats, and we seem to be swimming upstream in intellectual effluent. The news has become opinion. The irrelevant has transcended the important. And Diogenes has again come forth with his lamp.

The issue here, it seems to me, is whether developments in communication have compromised our ability to think, on the one hand, and on the other, compromised our ethical sensibilities. Have we really thought through the consequences of our encouragement of the latest in communications practice and technology?

I am no Luddite, but I have a long background in the field of technology and I can appreciate the dangers of techno-lust. I am simply urging here that we not lose sight of why we communicate and it's the quality of the outcome of the communication we should have foremost in our mind, not how many blogs we have or tweets we produce.

What roles do the sociological, economic, and political languages play in communications?

The phrase "China is a currency manipulator" is loaded with sociological, economic, and political overtones that generate different responses from different people at different times. It's not clear that these responses are planned for, anticipated, or even completely understood. It seems to me that there is a potential for a collective response that nullifies the intent and potential value of the communication. "Will it play in Peoria?" is not enough. In a globalized world the message will likely need to play in multiple venues.

Perhaps there is a danger in our instruction that our communication instruction neglects to consider the impact of these other languages. Communications as taught in American educational institutions is not the only way of communicating effectively and may likely not be the most effective way.

How are communications affected by cultural factors?

I first encountered *Cultural Acumen for the Global Manager: Lessons from Project GLOBE* (Javidan & House, 2001) in late 2002.

GLOBE is a multi-phase, multi-method project in which investigators spanning the world are examining the inter-relationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership. Approximately, one hundred seventy social scientists and management scholars from 61 cultures/countries representing all major regions throughout the world are engaged in this long-term programmatic series of cross-cultural leadership studies ("GLOBE," 2010).

In short, this study is about the manner in which culture and society affects decision-making within the organization. Decision-making is manifest in action and results and is the result of communications. The manner in which a decision maker effects action is likely to change across the ten cultural communities identified by Javidan and House. To what extent do these cultural considerations inform our instruction in communication? I suspect the answer is not as much as perhaps they should.

I used the following words in my closing comments to the 2007 CUNY Conference on Academic Integrity.

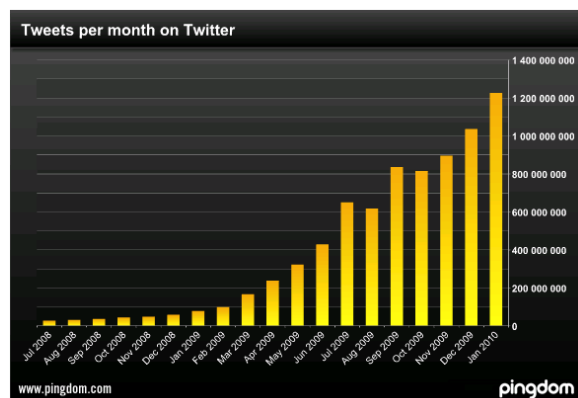
Here is a provocative question. Do American ethical values help or hinder in developing the world? We talk very much about how international students come to America. There is an implication in our discussions that we think they will stay here. A lot of my students don't. They go somewhere else for their careers. So we teach them a certain set of ethical values that may not really apply to their particular situation. We ought to be somewhat sensitive to this particular issue (James Drogan, 2007b).

Substitute "communications skills" for "ethical values." The caution I suggested in 2007 applies today in the context of communications instruction.

The Yin and the Yang of Ten Years of Change in Communication

Yin

Exponential increases in communications momentum leads to shifting more time into management of information and less on developing knowledge from communication



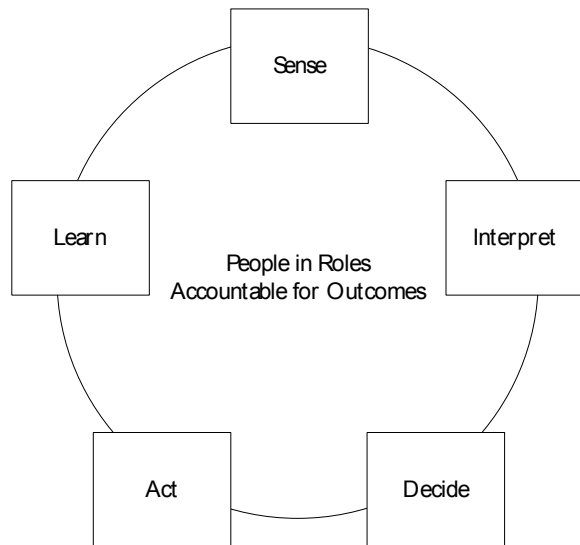
Communications momentum is the product of the mass of communications and the velocity at which it arrives. Few would argue against the exponential growth in communications momentum.

The graphic ("Twitter's Growth Still Accelerating," 2010) to the left charts the rise in activity on Twitter.

I very much doubt that this behavior is unique. Think, for example, of what is happening in one's personal or work e-mail space.²

² I would be very much in favor of banning all Reply All buttons from all e-mail systems.

Through the portal that connects one with cyberspace gushes an enormous amount of flotsam and jetsam amongst which lie the pearls of meaningfulness. The trick then, is to find and create value from the pearls. This – filtering, categorization – becomes an increasingly time consuming task.



In the context of a SIDAL loop (adapted from Haeckel & Slywotzky, 1999), energies begin to congregate towards sense and away from other critical aspects of the loop.

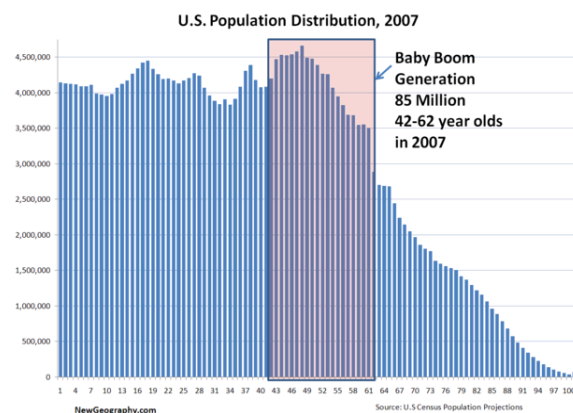
In *Homer, Great Books and Modern Life* (James Drogan, 2006c) I provide some thinking on how to deal with this growth in communications momentum.

Capacity mismatches between communications and cognition

The immediately prior “yin” is, as you might expect, closely related here. Our cognitive capacity does not grow at the same rate as communications momentum. I have something to say about this in *Homer, Great Books and Modern Life*. I will also return to this matter in the section on Yang (see *A picture is worth a thousand words becomes real*).

The rise of the neo-communicators

I first gave some thought to the idea of neo-communications in my preparatory paper for the Seventh Annual Schwartz Symposium (“The Seventh Annual Symposium on Communication and Communication-Intensive Instruction,” 2007). There was, is, and will continue to be the rise of neo-communications practiced by neo-communicators (e.g., our 16 year old granddaughter) who can keep several simultaneous communication streams going concurrently with confidence and comprehension.



A quick glance at the graphic (Schill, 2008) to the left tells us that there are more neo-communicators than there people like me, aka paleo-communicators.

Does that portend a widening communications gap?

Decrease in the need to confirm understanding

I’m thinking in particular here of Facebook and Twitter. I would characterize the preponderance of the communication via these two systems as push and, in several ways, in contravention to the principles of communication on page 1. There is no *a priori* consideration of relevance or *ex post* assessment of

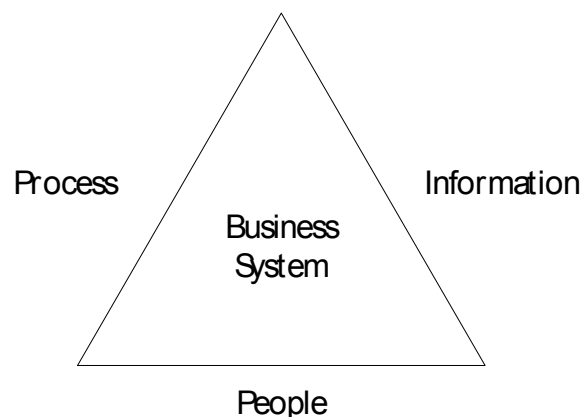
understanding. One is left to wonder about the amount of bandwidth consumed by the human in flogging communications that lacks relevance.

Multiple personas

The communications of the day provide an opportunity for one to have multiple personas (e.g., button down, cool dude). Perhaps the risk being run here, perhaps more often than we might realize, is who is the real you? For example, from time to time I sit on search committees. One of the first things I do is to search the Internet using the candidates' names. Suppose I find the "cool dude" when the candidate was presenting himself as "button down." I now have a potential clash that I must deal with. Or should I? Should I just accept the picture the candidate is presenting to the search committee? Is what I have done inappropriate, an ethical *faux pas*?

Small decision windows

For some time I have argued that decision windows³ are growing smaller. The amount of work needing to be completing not only grows (e.g., the effect of communications momentum), but the processes (e.g., SIDAL, page 4) for completing the work need to be completed in a shorter period of time.



These effects represent a strong force shaping the design, implementation, and operation of the underlying business system.

The impact on the business system is an area that requires more examination. For example, how does one effectively move the Twitter stream through the SIDAL loop?

The intrusion of authority

Modern communication systems provide more opportunity for authority to intrude upon developments than heretofore possible. It is doubtful that *Total Information Awareness* ("Information Awareness Office," 2010) would have emerged an early 2002 without the development of tools and techniques associated with modern communications and, most importantly, new ways of thinking about acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of information.

The Ninth Law states, "Once it's out there, it's out there" (J. Drogan, n.d.). We need to be conscious that every time we create a new login, every message we deposit into cyberspace results in more stuff "out there." Perhaps we would rather not have it "out there."

Always on, always connected, always transmitting; is this a good thing?

I had previously raised this issue (James Drogan, 2003) and blogged about it (James Drogan, 2009a).

Face-to-face has moved through voice-to-voice to bits-to-bits, narrowing the range of communications (i.e., 1,000 unread e-mails)

By range of communications I mean the totality of the communications channels open to us. For example, in face-to-face one reads body language and in voice-to-voice one reads tone and inflection. Both channels are missing in the form of digital communication most of us use most of the time – text.

³ A decision window opens when an event occurs and closes when the outcome can no longer be changed through intervention. The decision window available to batter in major league baseball is, for example, about .5 second ("Timing," 2007). See *Managing the Business* (James Drogan, 2007a) for further examination of this issue.

Consequently, the communication bandwidth is narrowed and we consequently have a narrow view of a situation.

Most of the time this is by accident. Sometimes, however, it is by design.

Patterns

This issue was raised by a recent new item regarding Facebook “We’re building towards a web where the default is social - every application and product will be designed from the ground up to use [people’s] real identity and friends” says Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive (Nuttal, 2010). The concern I have here is that patterns of behavior that may include other, perhaps unsuspecting people, become easier to discern and to exploit in legal and illegal, ethical and unethical ways by well-meaning and not so well-meaning people.

Concluding the Yin

The last ten years of communication have brought a rather by-design and by-chance interwoven sets of risks and rewards, opportunities and threats, strengths and weaknesses, transparency and opaqueness that, if not representative of anarchy, border on anarchy. In many respects we have been seduced by the siren call of always on, always connected, always transmitting.

Yang

Exponential increases in communications momentum leads to greater insight and innovation

On the other hand, the rise in communications momentum provides the opportunity to develop greater insight as a precursor for greater innovation. We will be unable to take advantage here unless we find ways to have a more balanced distribution of resource about the SIDAL loop (p. 4). There are three actions that can be undertaken in this regard.

1. Ignore the momentum. Dial back on either the mass or the velocity.
2. Increase the use of technology for interpretation, decision, and action. This should be done with extreme caution because of the knock-on effects in action (James Drogan, 2008a).
3. Increase the use of personnel highly trained in the arcane arts relevant to the matters being introduced into the SIDAL loop. There is a risk here than in a world of increasing labor mobility where knowledge and its valuable application is becoming increasingly prized, skills could simply walk out the door.

Exponential increases in communications momentum leads to greater insight and innovation: Growth in grammar and syntax, relevant information, and different mediums results in more people being connected, increasing curiosity, increasing advancement

There is a new language emerging – cyberease – a cacophony of text, symbols, pictures, videos, and sound (maybe someday touch and smell) that increasingly ties the travelers of Spaceship Earth together with each other and with Spaceship Earth (“IBM - A Smarter Planet - Overview - United States,” n.d.).

Communications acupuncture (precision in message and placement): Leading to fragmentation (e.g., political processes)

We are becoming more precise in the placement of messages and the relevance of their content. Google AdWords (“Google AdWords,” 2010) is a leading example of communication acupuncture. The value is that the inbound is tailored to the cognitive.

However, this precision rests upon information of the wants and needs of the recipients that may be increasingly difficult to come by. This could lead to fragmentation amongst communities and to bifurcations in systems resulting in degradation of performance.

A picture is worth a thousand words becomes real: Improved speed and comprehensiveness of comprehension: The rise of pictographs, hieroglyphics, character writing: Faster recognition of the relevant



We return to the past to find the future. Emoticons, SMS text, as was Morse Code, are but waypoints to a potential future of communications.

Concluding the Yang

It would appear that I am pessimistic, or at least skeptical, of communications developments over the last few years. To some extent, I think that's true. In a paradoxical way, more humans have been brought into contact with one another, but simultaneously I sense a decrease in humanness.

On the other hand, perhaps it is true that the Yin is outpacing the Yang, that this is the natural order of things.

Coda

This is, as mentioned in the beginning, but a rough sketch to which I hope to add finer levels of detail and coloration as time goes on. The Schwartz Communication Institute at Baruch takes on significant issues and, on an annual basis, prods me to think more about fundamental aspects of the Blue Marble.



The world has become a smaller place, a faster moving place, a place of increasing complexity, transparency, and opacity. Much of this is the product of communications developments that have certainly occurred over the last few decades, but also have their roots (see Mayan Pictographs p. 7) in the dim, distant past.

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Appendix

Because of the size of the diagram it has been broken into three parts.⁴

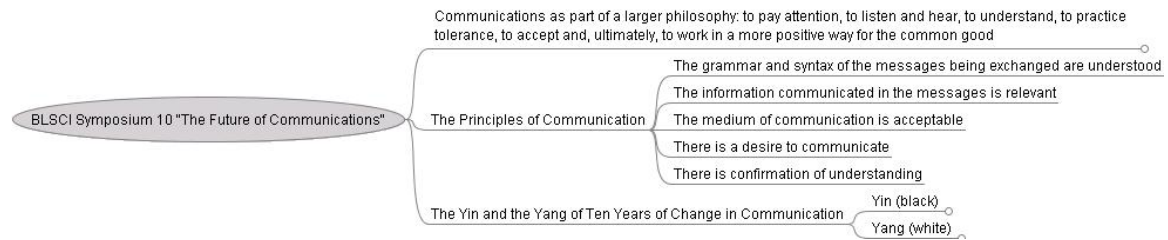


Figure 1 First and Second Levels

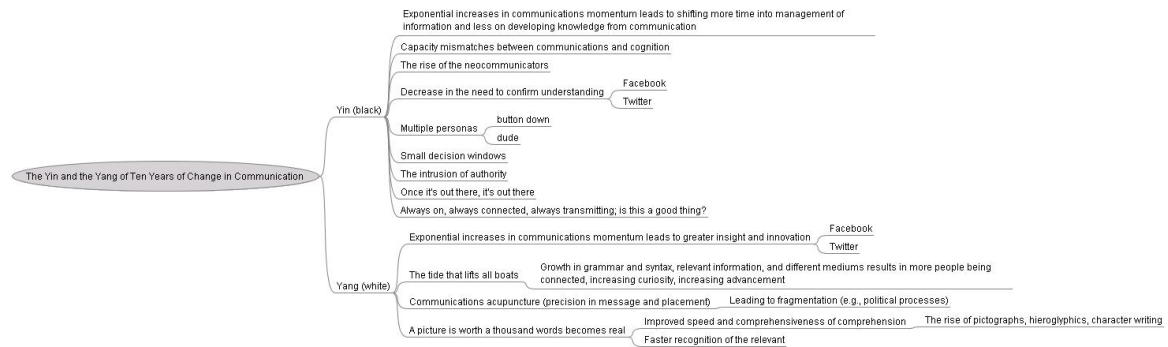


Figure 2 The Yin and the Yang

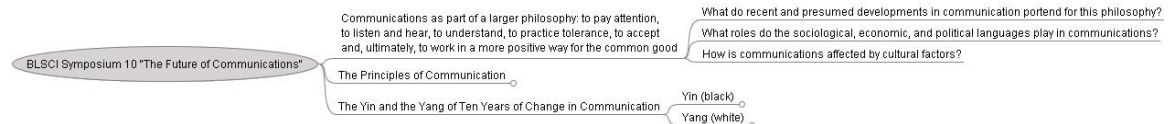


Figure 3 Top Branch

⁴ The mindmap was created using Joerg Mueller's Freemind available at <http://freemind.sourceforge.net>.